Nomination

of

Dr. John Maclennan - Clinical Ecologist

for his accomplishments
in the last thirty years treating
people with environmental illness.

nominated by

Chris Brown

Ottawa

May, 1985

Dr John Maclennan was born nearly 73 years ago in Glengarry county in Eastern Ontario. But he grew up in Edmonton and received his formal education there, culminating with his M.D. shortly before WWII.

In his late twenties, during the war, Dr. Maclennan served with the Royal Canadian Navy, running a hospital lab and spending a portion of his term of duty at sea. After the war he took further training, travelling to the Cook County graduate medical school in Chicago to specialize in allergy.

Within a decade Dr. Maclennan started investigating why some people were not responding to treatment for allergy, and over the next ten years he discovered that many patients wit allergies were also having non-allergic reactions to chemicals in food, in the air, and in materials in the environment. He and other doctors across North America and in Britain had discovered <u>environmental illness</u>.

Environmental illness affects people to varying degrees. We read in the paper and see on TV the extreme cases, the people who are the media say are "allergic to the twentieth century", (even though their main problem is not allergies but sensitivities.) But those are just a few per cent of cases. Most people aren't so seriously affected that they can't cope, as long as their doctor is familiar with the illness, as more and more are. Also needed to cope are chemically-safe housing, employment, food, and friends. With perfume, hairspray, cigarettes, and dry cleaning that last one, friends, can be harder than you'd think.

(Incidently, it also helps a great deal if the National Capital Commission doesn't spray the park just across the street. Many have had to move temporarily to avoid chemical spraying, or to recover after being exposed to it. Agencies such as the N.C.C. who use such chemicals have not been quick to reimburse people for these expenses.)

Back twenty years ago when Dr. Maclennan was first treating people for sensitivities to chemicals he learned that three factors were most important. First, for those sensitive to chemicals used in food production, it was necessary to find sources of chemical-free food. While some in the sixties opted for natural foods for philisophical reasons, Maclennan was finding sources of unpolluted food for people who needed it just to regain their health. He brought in fish, whales, beaver, and other foods from Canada's north, which was then unpolluted. Even now, some people with environmental illness can only eat meat if it's been produced outside of the meat production industry. Road kills of game are one source of nourishment, and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources has helped a great deal in this area.

The second important thing Maclennan found environmentally ill people could do to become healthier was to establish a chemical-free 'oasis' in their homes, usually in the bedroom, so they could spend at least a few hours a day in an environment not provoking reactions. The total overall exposure is thus reduced.

Thirdly, people who have sensitivities have a tendency to develop new sensitivities, so they have to make sure the don't eat the same food every day, such as bread, or they may become sick again as they develop a new sensitivity. Foods must be eaten only once every four days or longer.

Many of the improvements environmentally ill people can make are made by themselves, changing lifestyles and changing their own personal environment. In 1969 Dr. Maclennan founded the Human Ecology Foundation of Canada, a non-profit charitable self-help group for the environmentally ill, where people with the illness could (and still can) talk over their experiences, and learn from others how to eliminate foods, chemicals, and other reaction- provoking substances from their environment once a doctor has diagnosed the problems.

Before environmental illness became sensationalized by the media, Dr. Maclennan found other doctors receptive to his techniques. It helped that he was one of the founding members of the Ontario Allergy Society. He is respected by other allergists for his treatment of allergies and for treating people with hypersensitivity reactions too. But since the media have confused allergy with sensitivity, allergists have cried foul. (People with environmental illness may have allergies, they may react to pollens or dust, but a reaction to a chemical is not an allergy.) Maclennan has constantly avoided the controversy and he's avoided medical politics, believing that the best case for the cause is well treated patients who are able to live healthy and active lives. And those he's produced.

In the past 20 years Maclennan has treated thousands of people with environmental illness. And he's trained other Canadian doctors in the techniques of what he and his colleagues call 'Clinical Ecology'. His clinical experience in helping people with sensitivities improve their health by understanding their own personal ecology has yielded a lot of valuable information.

Such as: In order to develop sensitivities a person must first have a genetic predisposition, then they must be exposed to a substance for a period of time. And as with any illness, stress is a factor. Sometimes people become sensitive to a food they've eaten a lot, or sometimes they start reacting to even a low level exposure to a chemical known to be a sensitizer. (There are so many sensitizers the official position of Health and Welfare toxicologists is that "It would be impossible to keep track of them all".) Some people, when exposed to a sensitizer such as formaldehyde can, within just a few days, develop sensitivities to all kinds of substances we'd think were innocuous.

More women suffer the problem than men. (Maybe that's why the predominantly male Ontario government hasn't faced up to its responsibility for health care delivery to these patients?) Maclennan feels the reason more women become sensitive is due to genetic factors, or it may be because women have had different lifestyles than men. Women are exposed to more sensitizers and they often carry a heavier

load, especially in a family situation. If they work at home they're exposed to aresols, cleansers, and other forms of indoor air pollution. They tend to use perfume and makeup more than men. And if they hold down what often amounts to a second job, a job outside the home, the increased stress may be a factor. Women, it's known, seldom have wives looking after them.

People in urban centres, as you might expect, tend to have sensitivities more often than those in the country. Again pollution and stress are thought to be factors.

Another interesting finding from Maclennan's clinical ecology experience: nearly 100% of schizophrenics tested are sensitive to tobacco smoke. A majority of them smoke. 80 % of them are sensitive to foods. Many have had a significant improvement in their condition when foods they're sensitive to have been removed from their diet. That's not to say that schizophrenia can be magically cured by eliminating 'offending' foods, but if a person's sensitivity reaction affects their brain, as it often does, they're better able to change poor behaviour patterns if they eliminate the substance, and their brain is not being sabotaged by a sensitivity reaction.

Maclennan's experience also indicates that a majority of obese people who have food sensitivities are physically addicted to certain foods. What happens is that when a person is regularly eating a food they're sensitive to, they may not notice a reaction as they eat the food because it's already in their system. It takes nearly a week for your system to eliminate all traces of something you've eaten. But if a person has been regularly eating a food they're sensitive to and then stop, they usually suffer withdrawals. They actually crave the offending food. Sometimes the food is a grain such as rye, or some other substance used in making alcohol, and the person's withdrawal symtoms and cravings can be mistaken for a psychological addiction to alcohol. Indeed, a psychological addiction can develop.

But most importantly, Maclennan's experience has shown that individuals with sensitivities have differing reactions. Corn may produce depression in one person, giddiness in another. Wheat may give one person hives, another a headache. These varying or 'non-specific' reactions make duplication of experiments difficult. No two groups of people will produce the same test results. Fortunately, however, scientific validation is possible through repeated double-blind tests on the same groups. Various testing methods are available, each with different accuracy rates for different people. I'll leave the description of these tests for those more qualified, but one method simply involves removing the offending substance from the person's environment for a week, then re-introducing it and observing whether there's a reaction.

For Maclennan, the real proof is in the pudding. If a person is tested without their knowing what substance they are being tested for (several tests allow this), if the substance and other substances they're reacting to are removed from their environment and their symtoms are reduced, then they're cured. Right? Wrong! They're better

off now, but remember Maclennan warns that people with environmental illness have a tendency to develop new sensitivities if they're continually exposed to a substance, or repeatedly exposed to it over time. So even for the person who's able to manage their environment and get rid of the things they react to, they must also watch that they don't eat any particular food too often, or they stand a chance of becoming ill again as they become sensitive to that food.

On the horizon? Who knows? Saskatchewan is the only province recognizing the disease, although Ontario has appointed a commission to study the problem. Meanwhile some people are struggling who really need help. To them, Dr. Maclennan has often provided his services for free, especially to people caught in the environmental illness merry-go-'round - too sick to work and too poor to get a place to live that's free of things they're sensitive to so they can get well enough to work.

However, as the medical establishment re-aquaints itself with Dr. Maclennan's work, and as more and more people realize that their afternoon office headache may not be just from the stress of their job, Dr. Maclennan's work of the past thirty years will is paying off in a big way, with perhaps one of the most beneficial preventive health programs Canada has seen. And the cheapest. Instead of treating symtoms with drugs, Dr Maclennan has been treating causes by helping patients remove them from their environment.

Instead of loudly claiming a miracle cure, Dr Maclennan has been quietly helping people help themselves get healthier. I suggest few more significant contributions have been made in the area of the environment, especially by one person, in Canada in the past three decades.

I feel Dr. John Maclennan deserves this award, as a doctor who made the effort to find out what was wrong instead of telling people it was all in their heads; as a clinician who's discovered ways of coping with the illness, helping thousands who've suffered physically and mentally, treating hundreds for free and helping victims help themselves by founding the Human Ecology Foundation; and as one man who has quietly accomplished a tremendous recovery of human potential through his deep commitment to environmental concerns.

Dr. Maclennan will be 73 this fall. Every week he still sees a few patients in his rural clinic on a hillside outside Dundas, Ontario, near Hamilton.